

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 12, 2007

The Honorable Jim Nicholson  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Nicholson:

We are writing you to express our concern with the January 31, 2007 expiration of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive 2002-006, which guides and implements Executive Order 13166. Executive Order 13166 requires that all federal agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), prepare a plan to improve access to its programs by eligible persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). We urge the VA to extend the VHA Directive voluntarily until all assessments and reports regarding Executive Order 13166 and its implementation have been completed, reviewed and its recommendations implemented.

We agree with the VA that our veteran population is a reflection of our Nation's diversity. As a result, many veterans and their family members need to access programs that assist persons who may have LEP. We know the VA has recently assessed the status of the VHA guidance implementation throughout the Department and its facilities. In a letter dated October 24, 2006, the VA commits to report the findings of their assessments in March 2007. We are looking forward to the data produced from your current initiatives and anticipate the VA will have fully complied with Executive Order 13166.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) is also currently investigating the VA's implementation of the VHA guidance of Executive Order 13166. In our request to the GAO we ask that they review the VA's compliance with the guidance issued in 2002 to ensure veterans have been receiving culturally and linguistically competent care. We look forward to their report and recommendations on ways to ensure veterans receive appropriate care.

However, since data or updates of the implementation through the VHA Directive (both the GAO report and the VA re-evaluation of its assessment) will not be available until after the Directive expires on January 31, 2007, we urge the VA to extend the guidance voluntarily. We find it reasonable for the VHA Directive to continue to implement Executive Order 13166 until the GAO has undertaken a formal review of its implementation and finds the guidance fully implemented.

We look forward to a prompt response to this letter before the VHA Directive expires on January 31, 2007. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Roberto Soberanis, in the office of Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis, at (202) 225-5464.

Sincerely,



HILDA L. SOLIS  
Member of Congress



BOB FILNER  
Chairman, Committee on Veterans Affairs